

ANALYSIS

Spain-Egypt: politics and history

Unlike in the Maghreb, in the Middle East Spain does not have to deal with the history that sees the British and French as old occupiers.

ENRIQUE VAZQUEZ

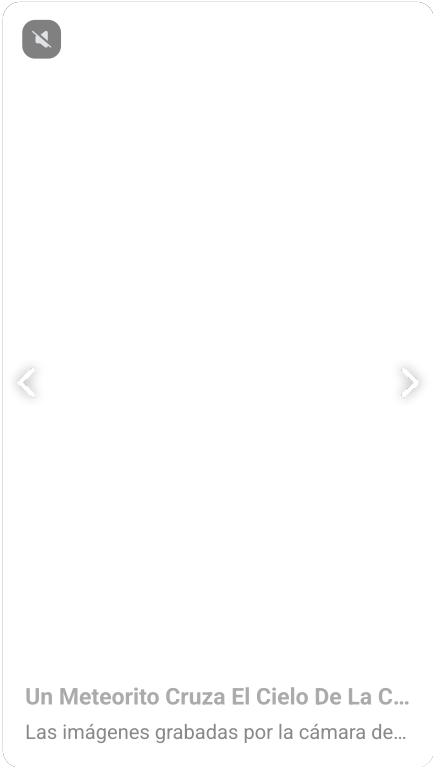
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A minister like Foreign Minister García Margallo, determined to relaunch the Spanish brand, will have noticed that in Egypt he has it relatively easy, especially thanks to the global leadership of national football: the Egyptian press, starting with major state media outlets like the daily Al Ahram and the MENA news agency, cover the Spanish League minute by minute, and our footballers are popular.



The minister is giving a strongly economic dimension to his administration and has not hesitated to describe it as a pawn in economic recovery for the sake of international trade. This explains why he announced the upcoming presence of Spanish ministers from various branches and the creation of a bilateral business consortium. All as expected. But it is also significant that President Morsi, who received him, accepted an invitation to officially visit Spain.



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But behind this explicit focus on numbers, trade, and business, there is an excellent image in Egypt for several reasons—notably Madrid's position and demands—but also because, unlike in the Maghreb, where Spain was a former occupier, the Middle East it doesn't have to deal with the history that views the British and French as the former occupiers.

A little history

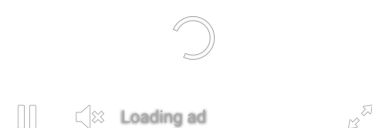
En este marco, la política española es percibida en El Cairo como la de un socio o un amigo desinteresado, además de un país con parte de su brillante pasado – al-Andalus – vinculado a la civilización y la historia árabes y cuya escuela de eminentes arabistas es bien conocida y muy estimada allí. Entre nosotros la obra inmarchitable de don Emilio García Gómez se debe en buena parte a su visita a Egipto como joven graduado y su encuentro allí con el gran Taha Hussein.

Juiciosamente, cuando España tenía aún pocos medios, se preocupó de abrir un Centro Cultural Español y siempre la parte egipcia ha correspondido con otro en Madrid. Sorprende comprobar el número de intelectuales egipcios que hablan español, lo estiman y lo difunden. En el mundo diplomático oficial, en fin, la embajada en El Cairo es codiciada y tenida por un puesto eminente y difícil que han ocupado primeras firmas de nuestra diplomacia.

En un correlato más prosaico hay que subrayar que Madrid, bajo todos los regímenes políticos, sostuvo la causa de la liberación nacional egipcia, de hecho un protectorado oficioso británico hasta 1952. España cooperó con el largo gobierno de Gamal Abdel Nasser (hubo un encuentro en alta mar, en el Mediterráneo, no bien documentado, entre el carismático líder egipcio y el general Franco) y gobierno y sociedad entendieron muy bien la nacionalización del Canal de Suez en 1956, que una intervención militar anglo-franco-israelí – boicoteada por el Washington del general Eisenhower – no pudo impedir.

Un contexto grato

Estas pinceladas prueban que hay una curiosa relación poco publicitada entre especialistas, entre los dos países de los extremos del Mediterráneo. Y habrán advertido la ausencia de toda tensión bilateral y pueden dar por suelto antiguo y seguro para los españoles, como nos decía recientemente una larga experiencia de España y ahora profesor invitado en la universidad



Egipto ha llegado con el fin del régimen autoritario del general Mubarak a una encrucijada histórica: es una democracia en ciernes que para final de año será una democracia fuerte si, como está previsto, se aprueba la nueva Constitución ahora en trance de redacción por un comité de cien sabios de todos los colores. El presidente Morsi se está imponiendo con autoridad y gran destreza táctica y goza visiblemente del aprecio de Washington que (con más diligencia y perspicacia que muchos europeos, dicho sea entre paréntesis) comprendió que la revolución era irreversible.

In this bilateral framework, in the absence of conflict, with Morsi's promised visit, the support of the king, so well-versed in Arab affairs, and the Egyptian economic recovery assured by Washington and the IMF, Spain can and should be an active presence and a relevant player. Morsi has set the tone for how the Islamic world should proceed with the Syrian tragedy, with a perspective that Madrid can readily support. Economics, pragmatism, business... but also, and with a capital P, politics and history.

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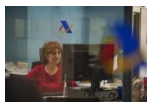
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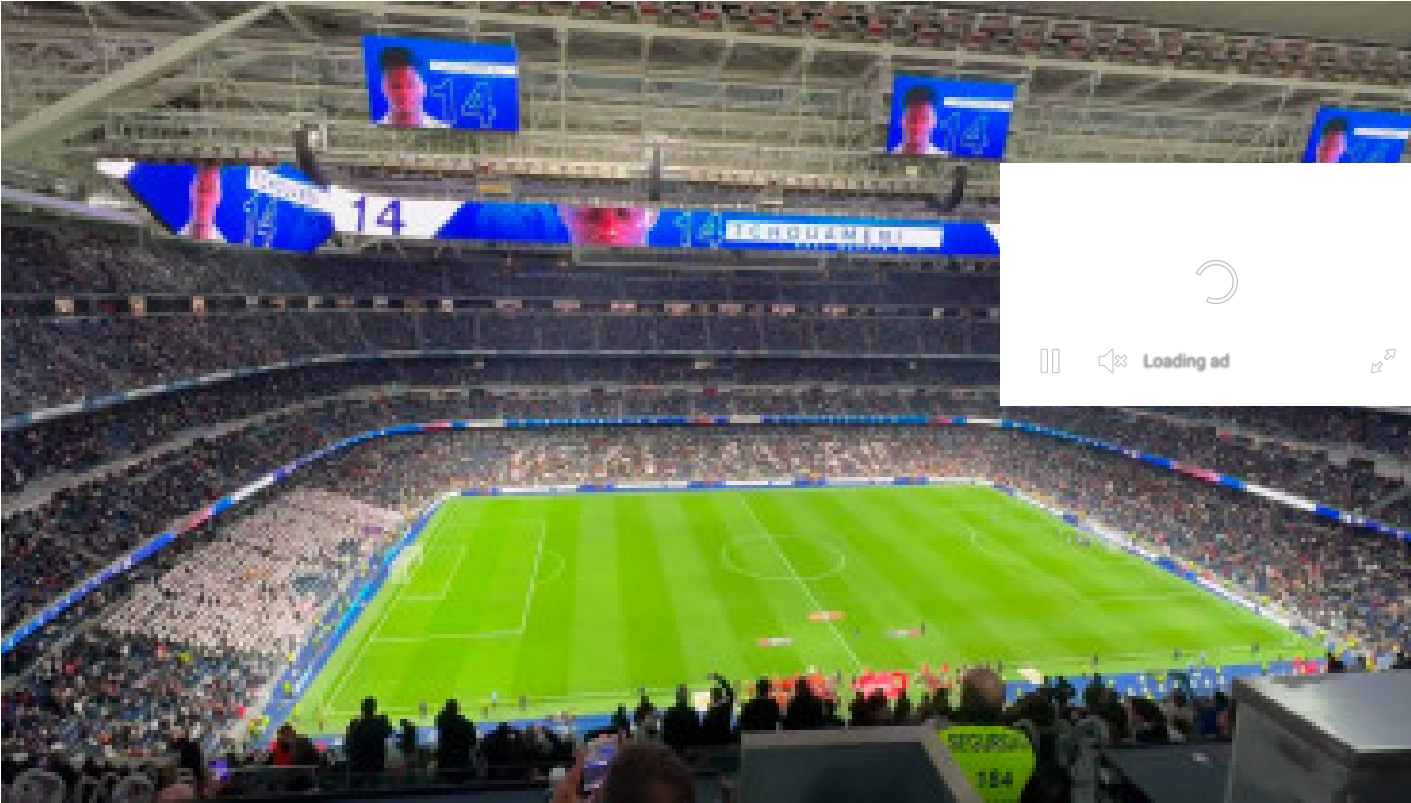
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